

Can I keep her? by PlaidDino

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Summary: Finding an unexpected friend and keeping them hidden with him isn't exactly something new for Mike. Deep in the back of his mind, it's actually all-too familiar. Drabble. A little bit of Mileven.

Can I keep her?

Author's Note: Hey there! I hope you enjoy my first fanfiction. This didn't turn out exactly how I wanted, especially since I couldn't remember some of the things I wanted to include here. Anyway, let me know what you think. Thanks! -PlaidDino

The child hissed with triumph as he finally captured the slimy toad in a small plastic container, clapping his hand over the top to keep the creature from hopping out. He had caught many amphibians in his times outside, playing in the yard in the hot summer afternoons and sitting on the porch in the evenings. But this one was special.

Now, this was *Mike's* toad.

He would take care of his toad, and make sure it was happy and comfortable. He filled a larger plastic tub with muck and leaves and things, anything that he thought a toad would want. He promised it he would catch bugs to feed it. He felt a buzz of excitement. The best part of all, was that it was a secret. Nobody would know, except for him and his secret friend, the toad. He carried the toad to its new habitat, the tub he set out for it at the side of his house, and gingerly placed it inside.

Mike gazed at it with fascination as it stayed still, but he could see its sides moving with each breath. Then it hopped, almost hitting the boy's face, and he gasped. "No! You have to stay." He urged it, leaning over the tub more. "Don't worry. I'll bring you some bugs." He said, looking over his shoulder to eye the glittery light of the fireflies. "Okay? Stay right there!" It wasn't a very efficient system. He had to take the time to catch a firefly, and then when he tried to offer it to his toad, it would fly away, and the toad wouldn't bother to catch it. Still, he liked his toad. It was almost dinner time, but he was making plans for what they would do the next day.

He couldn't wait to visit his toad again in the morning. He gobbled down his breakfast. "Slow down, Mike." His mother scolded. He nodded, but didn't really make any effort to slow down. The moment he was finished, he rushed to the door, when his mother stopped him. "Where are you going in such a hurry?" She asked.

"Oh... um..." The young boy, being a horrible liar, was trying to think of an excuse. He couldn't. Besides, while keeping his pet a secret was thrilling, he knew he would have to tell his parents eventually. It spilled out of his mouth without a thought. "I found a toad. Can I keep it? Please?" He begged, eyes wide.

"Toads can be poisonous." His father warned from the living room. At this, his mother frowned with worry. "Toads belong in the wild." She said. "But Mom!" Mike protested, "It'll stay outside!"

"No."

Scowling, he went outside to check on his friend anyway, ignoring anything more his parents had to say. He felt his heartbeat speed up with excitement.

Then it felt like his heart practically stopped. The tub was empty. It left.

Mike didn't play outside for the next few days. It wasn't his parents' fault, but he still blamed them. But, like most children, the event that was so tragic was forgotten in the midst of new events and interests, and yet the tub still smelled like mud for years, even after Mrs. Wheeler cleaned it.

Mike couldn't tell if she belonged to anybody. She didn't have a collar.

He was riding home from school on his bike, when he saw her running across his neighbor's yard. He slowed to a stop, and at that moment, she looked at him, her brown eyes alert. The scruffy dog's tail started to wag only at the tip, but it soon spread to a full wag as her face melted into excitement. She ran over to him, her face happy, and he felt a smile light up on his face too. He got off his bike and pet her as she sniffed at his shoes.

She followed him home. At first he told her to go away, but she kept following him. He couldn't stay frustrated with a pair of hopeful, affectionate eyes. He walked his bike home, so that the dog could walk by his side with her short legs. She would jump up at his legs,

and he laughed, patting her head. When he got to his house, she seemed quite convinced that she was going to stay with him. He looked around, then he decided that she *would* stay with him. He knew his parents weren't too keen on animals—he had learned that from many times before. But for all he knew, she didn't have a home. She was dirty and tired. It wouldn't hurt to let her stay for a few nights.

He snuck her into the basement. He gave her a bath, trying to keep as quiet as he could, but it was hard to keep from laughing when she tried to leap at him, now wet and dirty. She clambered out of the bathtub as soon as he reached for a towel, and she ran from him, glancing behind her shoulder with a face that read, "Catch me!"

"Hey!" He called, louder than he had intended. He clapped his hand over his mouth. "Come here!" He whispered, chasing after her with towel ready. She would speed away from him as soon as he got close, and then stop and taunt him from afar. "Come here, you little-" He pounced down toward her, hoping to finally just reach her, but she darted away. He faceplanted to the ground. "You're really speedy, you know that?" He grumbled, picking himself up. She ran up to him and licked his face, and, seizing his opportunity, he cocooned her in the towel. "Gotcha!" He laughed. He didn't know how, but the name Speedy just stuck.

He liked dogs a lot, but this one was his favorite. She was *his* dog.

It felt like they were together for a long time, but it really was just a few days. He couldn't keep her quiet down in the basement, and one of his family members was bound to find out sooner or later, even with the distraction of Mike's new sister Holly.

"Michael Wheeler, are you hiding something down there?" His mother demanded as he protectively draped himself over the basement door. Almost as if on cue, Speedy could be heard barking from behind the door. "...Yes." He confessed, shrinking down. But then... hearing Speedy's excited bark, he felt brave. He would fight to keep Speedy. She was his friend! "Hold on!" He said, and he threw open the door, ran down the basement steps, and scooped Speedy up in his arms with a grunt. She was heavy for his scrawny arms, but he carried her up the stairs, looking at his mother with respect, but

defiance.

"This is Speedy. She followed me home. She doesn't make a mess, and she doesn't bark that often, really! I swear I'll take care of her, you don't have to do anything! Just, *please* can I keep her?" He ran his fingers through Speedy's fur, a small smile on his face. Mrs. Wheeler didn't say anything for a painfully long time. She was surprised, sympathetic, and conflicted, and he could just see her thinking hard by looking at her expression. "I... I'll have to talk to your father about it."

Mike listened to the discussion between his parents through the cracked door of the basement, holding Speedy to his chest and trying suppress the lump in his throat and the knot in his stomach. It wasn't good. He felt hot tears drip down his cheeks and spill onto the dog's fur. "I'm so sorry, Speedy. I promised you that I'd keep you here forever, but... I don't think that's going to happen. I'm sorry..." He buried his face in her shoulder, and he felt her wet nose press against his forehead as she tried to lift his face to lick it. "I love you so much."

In the woods, as it rained, they found the strangest person Mike had ever met.

Something just clicked inside of him that he wasn't entirely conscious of, and just like that they were tied to each other. Still, he hadn't planned on her staying at his house. He was just going to send her on her way. But she had to stay. She became a part of his world as they looked for Will, and he didn't even understand how.

He wasn't interested in any girls until he met her. And now, he didn't think he would be interested in any other girl. At least, not in the way he was with her. She was special. She was an enigma with a number for a name, and she was more powerful than he and his friends could fathom. She was beautiful, but not in the way most people saw beauty. But more than anything, she was *his* girl... friend. Not *girlfriend*, but girl friend. A friend who was a girl. And not *his* like she belonged to him or anything! She could go wherever she wanted! *Ugh!* Why did he have to correct himself, even in his own mind?

As he kept her hidden in the blanket fort in the basement, sneaking her food and showing her everything in the house when no one was home, he couldn't help but feel a spark of familiarity. It was the same feeling of dread and excitement, and he felt the same care, only stronger. He had hardly any idea of what was going on with her life up until the point that he met her, but he knew she deserved better. She deserved to be treated like a person. He didn't want to keep her a secret from his parents. He wanted to keep her with him like a member of the family, so that she could finally live like a human being. As dumb as it was, he almost felt like he needed to bring her in front of his parents, holding her hand, and ask like he had many times before, "Can I keep her?"

She had become so important to Mike in such a short period of time. Maybe it was because so much had happened. In the school, after car chases and baths, he felt like they were closer to ending this mystery than ever. And then... what would come next? Maybe then, he could give her the life she deserved. He wanted to show her everything, and keep her safe and happy. He gave her promises, so many promises. He felt so sure that this time he would keep them.

Too bad a fleeting kiss and promises weren't strong enough against scientists and monsters. She slipped away from him, bringing back those distant memories, those unhealed aches.

He lost a friend, he gained a friend, and then he lost a friend to save a friend. Why couldn't it have ended differently? Why couldn't they both be here today? She should be here with him. She should be living like a normal person.

She should be living like a normal person. And that's why he realized he needed to let go. He couldn't keep her. She wasn't some animal.

But he would try to find her so he could make it up to her. So that he *wouldn't* keep her. He would just be there for her, like a friend should.

Once she came back, she seldom left his side. They were tied in a way neither of them were entirely conscious of until it finally spilled out through whispers in the evening, years after they and their other friends faced new dangers and solved new mysteries. She was so

loved by that small circle of friends; the Byers, the Wheelers, Lucas, Dustin, and Hopper. They all worked together to try to piece together a new life for their strange, but wonderful friend. Nothing made Mike happier than to see her laugh, her bright smile erasing the marks of hurt on her face from her childhood, even if it was for just a moment. He decided he wanted to make her smile always.

That particular evening, when their whispers to each other changed their lives for good, the first whisper that finally gave them all the answers, which was uttered by Eleven, made him laugh.

"Can I keep you?"